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Alexandra Smith  
Marina Cvetaeva in the Artistic Imagination of Russian Poets of the 1960s-1990s

*Introduction.*

T.S. Eliot, whose theories on art influenced scholarly formation of the concept of modernism, suggested that modern art stemmed from the desire to escape from one's surroundings and feelings into a new form of art which produces in the audience a completely unfamiliar sensation based on shock and uneasiness. In his essay "The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism", Eliot concedes that this new art can be comprehended by people who possess the particular gift of artistic sensibility. These individuals might be seen as a natural elite. As Eliot puts it, "the poet naturally prefers to write for as large and miscellaneous an audience as possible, and that it is the half-educated and ill-educated who stand in his way" (Eliot, p.94). In Eliot's view, "the most useful poetry, socially, would be one which could cut across all the present stratifications of public taste – stratifications which are perhaps a sign of social disintegration" (ibid.). He considered theatre to be the ideal medium for poetry. For Eliot, Shakespeare's play was the perfect embodiment of poetic devices which epitomise several levels of meaning in the most effective way. He elucidates: "For the simplest auditors there is the plot, for the more thoughtful the character, for the more literary the words and the phrasing, for the more musically sensitive the rhythm, and for auditors of greater sensitiveness and understanding a meaning that reveals itself gradually. And I do not believe that the classification of audience is so clear-cut as this; but rather that the sensitiveness of every auditor is acted upon by all these elements at once, though in different degrees of consciousness" (ibid.). In addition to Shakespeare, Eliot considered Racine and

Baudelaire to be “the greatest two masters of diction” and “the greatest two psychologists” (Eliot, p.66). Eliot’s personal canon is akin to Cvetaeva’s list of important predecessors with whom she engaged in her own writings on several occasions. Likewise, the re-invention of the predecessors in a way that accolades modern artistic sensibility associated with performative qualities of literary texts, psychological insights, and defamiliarising effects of new forms enabled Eliot to invent his own version of literary history.

Both Eliot and Cvetaeva might be considered to be the continuers of the Romantic-Symbolist line of European poetry who nevertheless resisted the Romantic tendency to allow language to float into pure music and to manifest itself in its surviving traces in Symbolism. Cvetaeva shared with Eliot a strong interest in socially-useful forms of drama and in popular motifs, as well as a drive to recycle cultural material, displaying thereby a similar belief that the poet, who becomes traditional, performs an important form of cultural labour and reaches impersonality by “surrendering himself wholly to the work to be done”. The image of the modernist poet involved in the visionary mediation between the living and the dead – as described in Eliot’s 1919 essay “Tradition and the Individual Talent” – is akin to the modern hero because of “the great difficulties and responsibilities” required by the work to be done. “He must be quite aware of the obvious fact that art never improves,” writes Eliot, “but that the material of art is never quite the same. He must be aware that the mind of Europe – the mind of his own country – a mind which he learns in time to be much more important than his own private mind – is a mind which changes, and that this change is a development that abandons nothing *en route*, which does not superannuate Shakespeare, or Homer,

or the rock drawing of the Magdalenian draughtsman” (Eliot, p.39). According to Eliot, Dante and Shakespeare expressed the soul of their respective countries because they obtained it by great labour. Cvetaeva’s 1931 essay “Art in the Light of Conscience” (“Iskusstvo pri svete sovesti”) uses similar language of labour and responsibility, adopting thereby the late nineteenth-century culture of professionalism. Although the vision of Eliot and Cvetaeva of the modernist hero as an agent in the cultural process and their extensive use of subjective associationism in poetic imagery were inspired by Thomas Carlyle’s essay “The Hero as Poet” (1840), their conception of the man of letters as a cultural hero has strong modernist overtones because it brings together the critic and the creative artist into two interchangeable selves as bearer of tradition. By being critic as well as poet, he is capable of seeing into the depths of history. Eliot’s description of the historical sense is fully applicable to Cvetaeva because it involves “a perception not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence”. For Eliot, the modern poet must develop the consciousness of the past throughout his career which can be seen as “a continual self-sacrifice” and “a continual extinction of personality” (Eliot, p.39). He believed that, in this process of depersonalisation, poets approached the condition of science. Eliot writes: “[...] the historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and compose a simultaneous order” (Eliot, p.38). Eliot’s suggestion that tradition cannot be inherited but must be obtained by great labour is exemplified well by Cvetaeva’s 1931 cycle “Poems to Pushkin” in which her

famous predecessor is portrayed as a person who values labour and physical effort in re-writing the past.

Furthermore, Eliot uses scientific analogies in order to describe creative process as something similar to chemical reactions: he defines the mature poet as “a perfected medium in which special, or very varied, feelings are at liberty to enter new combinations” (Eliot, p.40). According to this model, “the mind of the poet is the shred of platinum”: “It may partly or exclusively operate upon the experience of the man himself; but, the more perfect the artist, the more completely separate in him will be the man who suffers and the mind which creates; the more perfectly will the mind digest and transmute the passions which are its material” (Eliot, p.41).

Likewise, Cvetaeva’s image of Pushkin presents a new type of creator who conquers his demons and masters the art of self-control. The above conception of modern poet who achieves depersonalisation through continual engagement with tradition and who acts as an agent of cultural change by communicating his new vision of historical sense in a manner that defamiliarises the habitualised experience of time and space in his reader is exemplified by Cvetaeva’s own creative career. Sadly, her essays and poetry were rediscovered in the Soviet Union only during the Thaw.

The present chapter will demonstrate how different literary generations in the post-war period engaged with Cvetaeva’s poetry and prose and how they re-invented her image as a cultural hero at a time when Socialist Realism’s demise triggered a search for new artistic forms and led to the resurfacing of the modernist tradition which had been suppressed in the 1930s-40s. The popularisation of Cvetaeva’s works in the Soviet Union in the post-Stalin period, initiated by her relatives, friends and prominent poets, coincided with the influx of western

modernist artefacts into the Soviet Union and with growing dissatisfaction with the discontinuities caused by isolation from European tradition strongly cultivated by Russian writers before the October 1917 revolution. Creative dialogues with Cvetaeva in the 1950s-1990s enabled many prominent Russian poets to overcome their sense of belonging to the periphery of Europe and to obtain status as among the cultural elite of Europe enjoyed by their modernist predecessors such as Stravinskii, Goncharova, Larionov, Evreinov, Diaghilev, Kandinskii, and Achmatova, to name just a few.

*The emergence of Cvetaeva as a cultural hero in the 1950s-1960s.*

During the post-Stalin period, Marina Cvetaeva was rediscovered as one of the most important twentieth-century poets, together with Boris Pasternak, Osip Mandelstam and Anna Akhmatova. Following the publication of her works in the second issue of the prestigious almanac *Literary Moscow* (Literaturnaja Moskva) in 1956, in *Tarusa Pages* (Tarusskie stranicy) in Kaluga in 1961, and in the volume of selected poetry edited by Vladimir Orlov (published the same year), several young poets, including Evgenij Evtushenko, Inna Lisnjanskaja and Bella Achmadulina, began to promote Cvetaeva as one of their favourite authors. The subsequent publication of Anastasija Cvetaeva's memoir *Reminiscences* (Vospominanija) in 1974 with a print run of 100,000 contributed further to her sister's growing popularity in the Soviet Union, as is well documented in Elena Shvarc's 2003 autobiographical book *The Visible Side of Life* (Vidimaja storona zhizni). Shvarc, one of the most innovative post-war poets, recalls meeting with Anna Achmatova in the early 1960s and talking about the samizdat copy of Cvetaeva's poetry that she

had brought to show Achmatova, in the hope of discussing it with her. Achmatova displayed indifference to that topic of conversation, and Shvarc had to cut short their meeting. The two poets never met again (Shvarc 2003).

Shvarc's enthusiasm for Cvetaeva's poetry is typical of the Thaw generation. Following the death of Stalin on 7 March 1953, changes in Soviet poetry began to occur rapidly. Soviet lyric poetry was officially criticized for falling behind other literary genres such as the novel and the short story. During a conference on lyric poetry organized by the Leningrad Branch of the Writers Union in November 1953, Olga Berggolc, a famous war poet known for her liberal views, urged a revival of lyric poetry and waged a campaign to bring lyric poetry back into the Soviet canon (Lygo 2010, p.16). In Leningrad, the investment in young writers inspired by Berggolc and her supporters resulted in the creation of several literary groups that opted for independence from the Writers' Union. The mentors working for various literary associations and clubs encouraged young poets to publish their works. Yet, after the tightening of censorship and the growing politicisation of publishing in the mid-1960s, poets like Shvarc began to rely more on samizdat than on official publishers.

By the end of the 1960s many conservative poets had become scornful of any deviations from the Soviet poetic canon that was mostly oriented towards epic genres and classical versification. Thus Michail Dudin, speaking at the Fourth All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers held in 1967, stated that, while the use of iambic pentameter should not be seen as a slavish imitation or parody of Aleksandr Pushkin, emulation of Cvetaeva and Igor' Severjanin should not be automatically welcomed as innovative and experimental (Lygo 2010, p.89). In the eyes of

conservative Soviet poets, Cvetaeva became associated with experimental poets who were eager to break the mould of Socialist Realism by opting for a highly individualistic experimentation with style, syntactical structures, rhymes and meter. Similar developments were happening in the visual arts. Thus, following the exhibition of Pablo Picasso's paintings in Moscow in 1956, many hostile critics continued to belittle modernist art in the 1960s. Yet, as Eleonor Gilburd observed, in the Soviet Union "Picasso was a literary phenomenon as much as a visual one", especially because many advocates of his works were literary critics, poets and writers rather than art historians. Furthermore, a significant number of art critics interested in Picasso's experiments were engaged both in literary and fine art studies, or worked on the relationship between word and image (Gilburd 2006, p.68). Thanks to their efforts to promote Picasso's works and ideas, in the late 1950s-1960s Picasso's name became synonymous with creative freedom. Likewise, as demonstrated by Dmitrii Shostakovich's 1974 vocal cycle (op.143a) that includes one poem from Cvetaeva's 1931 "Poems to Pushkin", during the period of samizdat culture's growing influence among the Soviet creative intelligentsia in the 1970s, Cvetaeva's name became a symbol of freedom of speech and of unbounded creativity. According to Gilburd, the strong visibility of modernist paintings in Soviet museums had a revolutionising effect, too: "If modernist paintings had cultural value, as the government and the museum administration seemed to grant, then being cultured did not require Sovietness. The collapse of boundaries between meaning and senselessness, culture and barbarity, health and illness was almost a natural – and certainly a national – disaster, described with images of a powerful torrent that threatened to engulf Russia. [...] Most powerfully, meaning gaps were



exposed not in abusive speech, which, after all, requires making sense even if by negation, but in silence [...]” (Gilburd 2006, p.82).

*Bella Achmadulina as an enthusiastic reader and disciple of Cvetaeva.*

The process of appropriating Cvetaeva in the new context – characterized by the clash of old and new values – was well documented in the poetry of Achmadulina (1937-2010), a leading Moscow poet of the Thaw generation. As Sonia Ketchian points out, Achmadulina was appreciated by Soviet critics for her talent and, at the same time, sneered at by them for her “nonsensical verbosity, eliteness, reconditeness and modernist metapoetry” (Ketchian 1998, p.86). It is worth mentioning that Achmadulina was a protégée of Pavel Antokol’skij (1896–1978), a well-known translator, playwright, artist, theatre director and poet who helped Achmadulina publish her first collection of poetry *String* (Struna) in 1962. Antokol’skij had been a close friend of Cvetaeva in the first years of the Soviet regime and was a good friend of Anastasija Cvetaeva, who was rehabilitated in 1959. Like Ilja Ehrenburg, who also knew Cvetaeva and promoted her poetry during the Thaw period, Antokol’skij was a great admirer of Picasso’s art and of the poetic theatre as developed by Russian modernist director Evgenij Vachtangov, with whom Antokol’skij had collaborated in the 1910s. To a great extent, Antokol’skij was a mentor of Achmadulina, and his vision of the theatricality of life and the performative aspects of poetry, rooted in Silver Age culture, influenced Achmadulina’s reception of Russian and European modernism.

Another important factor that affected her interpretation of Cvetaeva’s works is related to the popularity of Vladimir Majakovskij in the late 1950s-1960s,

when his newly-erected monument in the centre of Moscow became a symbol of experimental art, subversion and youthful spirit. As Gilburd aptly observes, poets and scholars interpreted Picasso's images in Majakovskij's terms and used his verse to explain Picasso's revolt against existing conventions (Gilburd 2006, p.100).

Cvetaeva's own enthusiasm for Majakovsky would have been welcomed by the poets of the Thaw generation whose taste was shaped by several prominent surviving representatives of Russian pre-revolutionary culture such as Boris Pasternak, Ehrenburg and Arsenij Tarkovskij, who saw Majakovskij's works as part of a European avant-garde movement. As Aleksandr Genis asserts, for Iosif Brodskij, Lev Losev and their associates, early Majakovskij was seen as a Russian version of T.S. Eliot (Genis 2014).

In order to see the impact of the re-discovery of Cvetaeva's works on post-Stalin poetry, it is useful to look at some poems written by Achmadulina, whose career was always associated with Cvetaeva: she actively advocated the idea of erecting a monument to Cvetaeva in Tarusa. Her husband Boris Messerer became this project's architect: Messerer and sculptor Vladimir Soskiew did create a monument to Cvetaeva in 2006. After Achmadulina's death, Messerer created a monument to her, too. It was erected in 2013 in Tarusa, near the monument to Cvetaeva.

A mimicking of Cvetaeva's life and mode of writing was already felt in Achmadulina's 1963 poem "Music Lessons" (Uroki muzyki). It is one of the earliest post-Stalin poetic responses to Cvetaeva's works in the Soviet Union. The poem suggests to the Soviet reader that the encounter with Cvetaeva's writings is both challenging and rewarding. Implicitly, it also critiques Socialist Realism's

preoccupation with the rationalisation of creativity, ideological concerns and simplicity. Achmadulina's poem invokes images of Cvetaeva's childhood taken from Cvetaeva's autobiographical work "My Mother and Music" (Mat' i muzyka), written in 1934 and published in 1935 in the prestigious émigré periodical *Contemporary Annals* (Sovremennye zapiski). As Karin Grelz aptly observes, the work's title is misleading because it focuses on Cvetaeva's attitudes to music, rather than on her mother's personality as a teacher of music. Grelz states: "[...] it is also a story of her mother's expectations of life and her attempt to transfer these great expectations to her children, who had to either live up to them or to liberate themselves from them" (Grelz 2004, p.137). Grelz rightly points out that, on a deeper philosophical level, the story "My Mother and Music" can be interpreted as "a story about the brevity and limitations of life and the attempts of individuals to surmount them through whatever artistic talents they possess" (Grelz 2004, *ibid.*).

Cvetaeva's autobiographical works, including her story "My Mother and Music," lend themselves to reading in a psychoanalytic vein. Given that psychoanalysis was suppressed in the Soviet Union at the end of the 1920s, it is not surprising that Achmadulina became attracted to Cvetaeva's introspective and experimental mode of writing. She especially liked Cvetaeva's meditations on the essence of creativity and the interrelationship between poetry, music and physical activities. In her poem "Music Lessons" (Uroki muzyki), Achmadulina brings to life the image of a young Cvetaeva and suggests that, prior to the adult experiences that enabled them to acquire a sense of purpose, both poets were part of the same tradition and shared the same pose in front of the piano:

[...] Марина, до! До – детства, до – судьбы,

до-ре, до – речи, до – всего, что после  
равно, как вместе мы склоняли лбы  
в той общедетской, предряльной позе [...]  
(Achmadulina 1968, p.108).<sup>1</sup>

This poem establishes a most profound kinship between Achmadulina and Cvetaeva with its origins not only in the imaginary space envisaged by Achmadulina's text but also in Cvetaeva's autobiographical works, such as "My Mother and Music" and "My Pushkin" ("Moj Pushkin", 1937). Achmadulina's above-mentioned poem highlights a direct link between ritual, music and poetry, invoking thereby Ancient Greek poetic performances and many of Cvetaeva's texts permeated with strong mythopoeic overtones that explore the magico-religious aspects of poetry.

Achmadulina's vision, embedded in the poem "Music Lessons," suggests that all poets share the same destiny and that they become aware of it during a symbolic ritual of initiation into performance. In other words, it suggests that every poet of significance needs a strong personality and an ability to endure long hours of concentration. It invokes Eliot's aforementioned thesis about traditional poets who obtain tradition by "great labour" because no true poet "has his complete meaning alone": he can be only appreciated in his relation "to the dead poets and artists" (Eliot, p.38). According to Eliot, while "some can absorb knowledge, the more tardy must sweat for it". The association between creativity and hard labour is exemplified in Eliot's view by Shakespeare who "acquired more essential history

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<sup>1</sup> "Marina, prior to! Prior to – childhood, prior – to fate, /and Re; prior to speaking; prior – to everything /that after while became the same;/prior to leaning our foreheads over the piano together/ – in childhood's shared position at the piano".

from Plutarch than most men could from the whole British museum” (Eliot, p.40). Likewise, Achmadulina presents Cvetaeva as a person who developed her consciousness of the past throughout her career and obtained it through hard labour. The lyric heroine of Akhmadulian’s poem also “sweats” for the knowledge of the past and sees art as a continual surrender to something more valuable than the individual self.

Achmadulina’s poem also reinforces the Romantic myth, which asserts that poets are destroyed by the societies to which they belong, as discussed in Cvetaeva’s autobiographical works in mythopoeic terms. In the essay “My Pushkin,” for example, Cvetaeva states that the first thing she learnt about Pushkin’s life was related to his duel and his death. In contrast to Cvetaeva’s description of Pushkin’s death, Achmadulina’s poem celebrates Cvetaeva’s childhood and presents the poet as a talented young person full of creative potential. It also underscores the difference between Achmadulina’s own cultural background and the historical period embodied by Cvetaeva’s works. The concluding stanza of Achmadulina’s poem affirms: “It’s useful for the aesthetic effect to shout loudly that I am like you! Like you!/I would have been happy to do it but I cry instead” (Achmadulina, *ibid.*). The poem reveals the paradox that becomes clear through application of the historical method of criticism to all works of art. It demonstrates that despite the existence of some similarities between epochs, the difference between the past and the present becomes obvious under close scrutiny, even when works of the past are relevant in the present.

As Jerome McGann puts it, “such works transcend their age and speak to alien cultures because they are so completely true to themselves, because they are

time and place specific, because they are – from our point of view – *different*” (McGann 1985, p. 2). As a result of the critical perspective embedded in Achmadulina’s poem, the lyric heroine of the poem distances herself from Cvetaeva: she achieves this by not subscribing to the widely-held fantasy of historical determination and the fantasy of universality (alluded to by the common traits of childhood in the poem, such as resistance to music lessons). Both tendencies are strongly felt in Cvetaeva’s autobiographical poems and stories that feature Pushkin, since she discusses Pushkin’s works highly selectively. However, by linking music lessons to poetry in the style of Cvetaeva, Achmadulina presents herself as an inventor of a new tradition that asserts the importance of performance both to poetry and to music in the style of Vachtangov’s poetic theatre, mentioned above. Both poets engage with a fundamental illusion of Romantic ideology (as conveyed in Pushkin’s 1827 poem “The Poet”), in accordance with which “only a poet and his works can transcend a corrupting appropriation by ‘the world’ of politics and money” (McGann 1985, p. 13), and both aspire to transform an aesthetic level of understanding into a self-critical one. Achmadulina and Cvetaeva share a belief that by isolating and historicising the originary forms of thoughts conveyed in poetic texts from the past, which enter the reader’s consciousness as forms of feeling, the reader could escape from certain illusions that might be inherited from the past subconsciously. While Cvetaeva articulates her difference from her mother and her mother’s tastes (associated with German Romantic music), Achmadulina highlights both the points of convergence and the points of difference between herself and Cvetaeva. The allusion to tears in the concluding stanza of the poem indicates inability to speak due to the intensity of emotions caused by reading Cvetaeva. The

poem describes the state of silence triggered by a stream of mixed feelings that Cvetaeva's works arouse in the reader.

Achmadulina's poem's title, "Music Lessons", invokes Cvetaeva's gesture in the essay "My Pushkin", suggesting that Pushkin's works and life might be seen as a set of lessons relevant in the present. Such a perspective on Pushkin's works avoids any faithful reproduction of Romantic ideology and abstract ideas from the past through use of the mediated voice of the narrator, who belongs to a different historical period. As McGann explains, "we shall reach for the unconsumed heart of the poem only if we are prepared to suffer a genuine change through its possession" (McGann 1985, p. 13). The distance between the poem's author and Cvetaeva, who acts as the subject of Achmadulina's poem, is articulated in the description of the emotional state. The somatic response to Cvetaeva's works and life described in the poem derives from a critical awareness of how post-war culture has advanced beyond the forms of consciousness that dominated the Romantic period. It is not coincidence that Achmadulina's poetry contains a large number of somatic images, described by a contemporary Russian scholar as "somaticisms". They are associated with the process of creativity (Pluzhnikova 2013, p. 26). In the poem "Music Lessons" Achmadulina uses one of her favorite somatic words – "forehead". It is linked to bodily experiences related to reading and writing poetry. Such a strong association between creative and bodily movements is borrowed by Achmadulina directly from Cvetaeva's poetry and fiction. As has been noted elsewhere, Cvetaeva's "Poem of the Air", for example, establishes a strong link between the process of breathing and creating, pointing also to the mnemonic functions of poetry (Smith 1999, pp. 218 and 221). As early as 1934 Alfred Bem, a famous émigré literary critic

of the 1920s-1930s, talked about the infectiousness of Cvetaeva's poetry and its direct impact on bodily movement and the process of breathing, suggesting that the process of reading her poetry causes a change in the reader's inner rhythms due to the intense tension inscribed in her texts. He wrote: "Through the form of her verse, or together with the form, the reader starts breathing faster, embodies her feeling and thinks in accordance with her logic" (Bem 1991, p. 105).

In addition to the use of somatic imagery, Achmadulina's poem mimics Cvetaeva's style with an abundance of dashes, exclamation marks and enjambment. As Simon Karlinsky observes, Cvetaeva's use of enjambment and parallel constructions is highly original, especially in her late poetry. According to Karlinsky, enjambment ceased to be a literary device in her late poetry and turned into an "internal part of her creative thinking". He elucidates: "Its role in the structure of her verse is analogous to the role of the choriamb in her metrics: a constant source of tension and of a potential clash between lines and stanzas, just as the choriamb creates tension between the feet of verse. In many of her later poems enjambment appears after the last line of the final stanza, as if the rhythmic drive had caused the last word to overflow the boundaries of the poem" (Karlinsky 1966, pp. 165-66). In contrast to Cvetaeva's conscious desire to articulate the fragmented state of modern life in her works, Achmadulina's excessive use of dashes and exclamation marks in the poem "Music Lessons" is related to the desire to point to the sublime order that governs life, highlighting thereby the interconnectedness of everything in everyday life through creativity. Achmadulina's reference to the superfluous nature of Alexander Gedeke's music is mentioned in the poem as a declaration that asserts the autonomy of the artistic mind. It alludes to the



polyphonic style of Gedeke's music as well as to his ability to compose and perform a wide range of musical works, including Bach's compositions for organ and piano. In other words, the poem celebrates Gedeke's ability to be eclectic and to engage with different traditions and historical epochs. The images of Gedeke and Cvetaeva become interchangeable in Achmadulina's poem since the lyric persona sees them as a living embodiment of freedom of the creative spirit.

Achmadulina's poem depicting the child Cvetaeva playing music might also be seen as an allegorical manifestation of the author's belief that, through performing musical compositions and poems produced by predecessors who represent different cultural traditions and styles, the performer (be it the poet or the musician) may enrich his/her own personality and the range of emotions that can be used as material for his/her work. In his 1963 review of Russian contemporary poetry, Adolf Urban identifies Achmadulina's striving for a poly-stylistic quality in her verse and for a wide range of emotional experiences as one of the most striking features of her experiments. He defines them as the act of humanization of the poetic persona (A. Urban 1963, p. 54). Urban does not mention Alfred Schnittke as a musician who introduced the notion of polystylism as the combination of many styles in a single work into Soviet music of the post-Stalin era, but it is evident that Achmadulina was aware of the notion of polystylism. Her poem "Music Lessons" foregrounds strategies of overcoming the crisis caused by the dogma of Socialist Realism in the Stalin period, relevant both to music and to poetry. The mode of writing found in Achmadulina's poetry and described by Urban as humanization can be also defined as confessional. In the post-Stalin period, characterized by the collapse of the official monumental style in art and literature, it is hardly surprising

that Cvetaeva's confessional mode of writing and dialogicity appealed to Achmadulina, who concerned herself with such notions as private life, spectatorship and the creative potential of everyday life. The postmodern notion of the collapse of metanarratives discussed by Jean-François Lyotard (Lyotard 1979, 1984) is strongly felt in Achmadulina's poem "Music Lessons", inasmuch as it calls upon the Soviet reader to shy away from the reductionist and teleological approaches to human history exemplified by Soviet Marxist dogma.

Achmadulina's 1967 poem "Biographical Note" (Biograficheskaja spravka) is another example of the impact of Cvetaeva's critical idiom on Achmadulina's mindset and artistic persona. It subverts the formal language of Soviet literary encyclopedias and textbooks and inscribes into the texts the facts of life reported in Cvetaeva's autobiographical poems and stories, including the essay "My Pushkin", published by the leading Soviet publisher "Soviet Writer" (Sovetskij pisatel') in 1967, thirty years after its first appearance in Paris. While the print run of the book *My Pushkin* was 20,000, the 1965 collection of Cvetaeva's selected poetry prepared for publication by Cvetaeva's daughter Ariadna Efron and Anna Saakiantz appeared in 40,000 copies. The latter was published in the highly acclaimed series "Poet's Library" (Biblioteka poeta). Inclusion in such a prestigious series indicates that Cvetaeva's place in the Soviet canon was secure as early as the late 1960s, although her poetry was not yet widely available to Soviet readers.

In the light of this first attempt to expand the Russian twentieth-century literary canon and include Cvetaeva as a major figure, Achmadulina's poem "Biographical Note" might be seen as a desire to immortalize Cvetaeva in the artistic imagination of the 1960s. It was done in the style of nineteenth-century

literary biographies that constructed the seductive image of the Romantic poet in order to make literary biography as a popular genre even more prominent and successful. As Julian North notes, the paradigm based on the combination “of reverence and iconoclasm, the elevated and down-to-earth” is still alive in biography and celebrity culture today. North traces its origin to the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and suggests that during that period “the relationship between biographer, subject and reader shifted decisively towards its modern form” (North 2009, p. 1). Achmadulina’s poem replaces a lengthy biography with a poem that presents Cvetaeva’s life in a compressed way: it mentions some of the important locations featured in her writings, such as Tarusa, Berlin and Paris. It also describes the courtyard of the house where Cvetaeva hanged herself in Elabuga on 31 August 1941 as a dark space that signifies the last phase of Cvetaeva’s suffering (“чернеет двор последнего страдания”), invoking thereby the Passion of Jesus Christ and the notion of martyrdom. By focusing on Cvetaeva’s private life in the context of historical developments in Russia that were implicitly invoked by the poem, Achmadulina, like Aleksandr Blok before her, erases the division between lyric and epic and highlights the fact that Cvetaeva embodied herself in her works so that the nation’s past and present – as she envisaged them – became inseparable from the symbolic structure of her own life. Given that Socialist Realism was often defined as a “twentieth-century incarnation of classicism” and as “a system based on clearly defined and delimited genres” (Carleton 1994, p. 992), Achmadulina, in her desire to subvert existing aesthetic conventions and taboos, appears to be a true disciple of Cvetaeva, one whose stylistic traits were determined by the subject matter and the emotional content of her work rather than by existing

conventions. As Cvetaeva confessed to Aleksandr Bakhrakh in a letter written on 5 and 6 September, 1923, even the choice of words should be subordinated to “the choice and purging of emotions” (Karlinsky 1966, p. 123).

The growing interest in private life and lyric consciousness among poets of the Thaw period derives from the crisis of the Stalinist aesthetic model of Socialist Realism, which was often criticized as a pompous monumentalism alien to ordinary people. In light of these developments, Achmadulina’s intention to emulate Cvetaeva’s confessional, highly individualistic and anti-philistine mode of expression and beliefs accords well with the dissatisfaction of many writers and critics of the 1950s-60s with the repressive censorship and conformity of Stalinism, as manifested in Ehrenburg’s novel *The Thaw* (Ottepel’, 1953) and V. Pomerantsev’s essay “Sincerity in literature” (“Ob iskrennosti v literature,” 1953). Achmadulina’s poem about Cvetaeva’s life breaks the mold of the official mode of expression that is oriented towards construction of a standard biography of the Soviet writer. In contrast with the common references to political activities subordinated to the role of the writer as an engineer of the human soul, Cvetaeva is described in Achmadulina’s poem as a happy independent girl who enjoyed exploring Russian literature and beautiful landscapes in Tarusa before the 1917 October revolution (in the poem she is affectionately called Musja, as Cvetaeva was in childhood) and concludes with depiction of a middle-aged mother who managed to survive until the end of August 1941 after her return to Russia in summer 1939. The exclamation at the end of the poem “Ты – сильное животное, Марина”<sup>2</sup> alludes to Cvetaeva’s long psychological poem “Poem of the End” (Poema konca, 1924) in which

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<sup>2</sup> “You are a strong animal, Marina”. (Translation is mine. – A.S.).

Cvetaeva employed the method of stream of consciousness (Karlinsky 1966, p.212) and presented herself as a wounded animal. Achmadulina's poem also contains parodic touches aimed at exposing the Socialist Realist cult of heroic deeds and its ability as an aesthetic system to induce the critical awareness that all texts operate "upon one's assumption of what constitutes the 'authentic,' the 'authoritative,' and the 'true' (Carleton 1994, p. 1009).

*Cvetaeva as a contemporary martyr in Evgenij Evtushenko's and Arsenij Tarkovskij's poems.*

Following Achmadulina's poetic celebration of Cvetaeva's life and poetry in the late 1960s, Evgenij Evtushenko (who was married to Akhmadulina in 1955-58) also started promoting Cvetaeva as a model for emulation. He described his visit to Cvetaeva's grave in Elabuga in his 1967 poem "A Hook from Elabuga" (Elabuzhskij gvozd') in terms that invoke an image of Cvetaeva found in Arsenij Tarkovskij's poems dedicated to Cvetaeva in 1941-1963. Both poets present Cvetaeva as a martyr-like figure who belonged to the generation that "squandered its poets", to use Roman Jakobson's phrase. In his 1930 article "The Generation that Squandered Its Poets" Jakobson states: "In several decades, we shall be cruelly invoked as the children of the last century. All we had were compelling songs of the future; and suddenly these songs were transformed by the dynamics of the day into a historico-literary fact. When singers are killed and their song is dragged into museums and pinned to the wall of the past, the generation they represent becomes even more bankrupt, orphaned, and displaced - disinherited in the most authentic sense of that term" (Jakobson 1967, p. 125). In one of Tarkovskij's 1963 poems dedicated to

Cvetaeva – titled “Laundry Chores” (Stirka bel’ja) – Cvetaeva is portrayed as a poet who could not overcome her poetic destiny and whose freshly washed dress is depicted on the washing line in the style of the cross on which Jesus Christ was crucified:

Белье выжимает. Окно –  
На улицу настезь, и платье  
Развешивает. Все равно,  
Пусть видят и это распятие. (Tarkovskij 1983)<sup>3</sup>

Tarkovskij’s poem is constructed in the style of a cinematographic montage that animates photograph-like mnemonic images from the past. Since he met with Cvetaeva on many occasions in 1940-1941, it is not surprising that Tarkovskij portrays Cvetaeva as an energetic person who tried her best to survive and who was crushed by her cruel fate near the river Kama.

Tarkovskij’s poem invokes the ancient Greek tragedies: fate is defined in his poem as a “mistress-fate” (khozjajka-sud’ba) and suggests that there was no escape for Cvetaeva from the circumstances that deprived her and her son of an income and the support of friends. Unlike Evtushenko, who presents Cvetaeva as a victim of Stalinism and declares at the end of his poem that “there are no suicides per se, there are only acts of murder”, Tarkovskij explores a much richer dimension of

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<sup>3</sup> “She wrings out her laundry. The window/Is widely open. She hangs her dress./  
Never mind./Let everyone see this image of the Crucifixion.” (Translation is mine. –  
A.S.)

Cvetaeva's suicide. He evaluates it in the context of the Romantic myth of masculine genius promoted by many of the male literary forebears of Cvetaeva, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, he links Cvetaeva's fate to that of many female poets whose lives reinforced the Sappho-Corinne myth in accordance with which death is seen as the ultimate outcome of a successful literary career for a woman. "By the 1830s a death wish," states Julian North, "was enshrined as part of the mythology of male Romantic genius, as exemplified by the suicide of Chatterton [...] or the willed self-destruction of Burns, Shelley, and Byron. In poems such as Shelley's 'Alastor' or Byron's *Mansfield*, suicide was represented as the ultimate act of solipsistic despair, but also the final declaration of the god-like self-determination of masculine genius" (North 2009, p. 216). It is worth noting here that Byron was one of Cvetaeva's favorite poets in her youth, and some Byronic overtones are still present in her late poetry. She was also particularly interested in other representatives of European Romanticism, including Alphonse Marie Louis de Lamartine, Heinrich Heine and Karolina Pavlova. Cvetaeva's interpretation of Pushkin's duel in her autobiographical essay "My Pushkin" displays several traces of the Romantic myth about the god-like self-determination of masculine genius.

Both Tarkovskij and Evtushenko appeared to be aware of Cvetaeva's poetic responses to the death of contemporaries such as Maksimilian Voloshin, Sergej Esenin and Majakovskij. In their poems dedicated to Cvetaeva, they reinforce her belief in the importance of a strong individuality for writing lyric poetry successfully.

Their poems portraying Cvetaeva invoke her own poetic responses to the suicides of Esenin and Majakovskij, in which she engages with the myth of the

Romantic poet-hero. As Olga Hasty has succinctly noted, in her analysis of Cvetaeva's poems written in memory of Esenin and Majakovskij, "Esenin's erroneous assessment of the role of his responsibilities makes him a passive victim of circumstances. His suicide is thus seen as the result of an insufficiency of confidence in himself and of faith in his poetry. Majakovskij's suicide is regarded as another manifestation of the volatility and energy that shape his poems. It is a forceful gesture dictated not by external pressures but by an inner necessity" (Hasty 1991, p. 846). Although, in his poem "A Hook from Elabuga," Evtushenko portrays himself as a rightful heir of Cvetaeva to whom the owner of the house where Cvetaeva hanged herself gives a hook, he partially misinterprets Cvetaeva's life and suicide by presenting his predecessor as a passive victim of history. Yet the concluding statement of Evtushenko's homage to Cvetaeva, "there are only acts of murder in this world, there are no suicides per se", invokes Cvetaeva's own formulaic statements in many of her poems, including the cycle "The Poet" (Poet) and poems dedicated to Esenin and Pasternak. We could consider, for example, these pronouncements: "Speech takes poets far away" ("Poeta daleko zavodit rech" from her cycle "Poet", 1923); "Those who lived during our epoch – lived fully" ("In memory of Sergei Esenin", 1926); "It is the destiny of strong persons not to be together in this world" ("Ne suzhdeno, chtoby sil'nyj s sil'nym /Soedinilis' by v mire sem" from her cycle "Dvoe", 1924) and "There are times when the sun turns into a mortal sin./Those who live during our times are not human" ("Est' vremena, gde solntse – smertnyj grekh./Ne chelovek – kto v nashi dni – zhivet"; "André Chénier", 1918). As V. P. Prishchepa pointed out, Evtushenko's tendency to use idiomatic and formulaic statements in his poetry is indicative of his aim to appeal to a wide range



of readers who would relate to his universal language, aphoristic speech and powerful imagery. Prishchepa thinks that Evtushenko manages through his poetry to mold himself into the image of the poet-preacher and a figure of authority due to his ability to empathize with different people and various ethnic communities. According to Prishchepa, the orientation towards aphoristic speech in Evtushenko's poetry developed into an artistic principle due to the perceived need of the Thaw generation to communicate their beliefs through public performances in a transparent manner (Prishchepa, V.P. 1999). Paradoxically, while rejecting Cvetaeva as a romantic idealist unable to cope with reality, Evtushenko shows his appreciation of the power of her poetic voice and explores the implications of Cvetaeva's verbal inventiveness, phonetic sensitivity to the Russian language, her imaginative use of paronomasia and effective communicative strategies, inseparable from the emotional and human orientation of her poetry in her own verse. As Karlinsky puts it, in the mature Cvetaeva "words are not used to connote or to imply or to suggest; they are selected equally on the basis of their shape, sound, and meaning, each of these qualities being equally necessary for the total poetic impression" (Karlinsky 1966, p.124).

In Karlinsky's opinion, very soon after establishing and mastering the cultivated romantic manner in her first books, Cvetaeva "arrived at a much simpler and more direct vocabulary and diction" that was occasionally found in her early poems, including the 1913 poem "You are walking and looking like me ..." ("Idesh' na menja pokhozhij...") which displays the simple diction of Cvetaeva, "her own voice at its purest and most personal" (Karlinsky 1966, p. 125). Many of Cvetaeva's poems are constructed in the form of a dialogue that presupposes an imaginary, real

or implied addressee (Aleshka T.V. 2006, p. 439). Yet, on many occasions, they represent the triumph of monologism over dialogism, “of the poet’s truth over the truths of the ‘market square’”, as exemplified by Cvetaeva’s 1925 long poem “The Pied Piper” (Krysolov) (Ciepiela, Catherine 1994, p. 1023). Evtushenko’s poem “A Hook from Elabuga” might be seen as a successful appropriation of Cvetaeva’s belief in the power of poetic truth. While the narrator of the poem addresses both Elabuga and the owner of the house where Cvetaeva hanged herself, he protects his fellow poet from any gossip and moral judgment by philistines. In this context Evtushenko’s desire to remove the hook on which Cvetaeva hanged herself from the house appears to be the gesture of a poet who does not wish to turn the tragic death of his predecessor into a spectacle available to tourists, whose photographs and reports might turn the place of Cvetaeva’s death into a sensational object available for mass consumption.

In the Introduction to the 1990 edition of Cvetaeva’s poetry and plays, Evtushenko cited his poem “A Hook from Elabuga” and stated that, together with Majakovskij and Pasternak, Cvetaeva was a highly professional poet-craftsman whose experiments transformed Russian poetry and determined its development for many years to come (Evtushenko 1990, p.17). Evtushenko’s statement about the experimental nature of Cvetaeva’s poetry testifies to how he himself used Cvetaeva’s verse as a model for emulation at the beginning of his career as lyric poetry began to return to the pages of Soviet journals, after several decades of repressive censorship and political intimidation that made lyric poetry almost non-existent in the public domain. The discovery of Cvetaeva by Evtushenko and other poets of the Khrushchev Thaw coincided with a revival of interest in lyric poetry and with the

formation of the post-Soviet subjectivity that started long before the post-Soviet period. According to Emily Lygo, lyric poetry became fashionable again through public performances by such poets as Evtushenko, Andrej Voznesenskij and Achmadulina. Lygo writes: “It carried a complex knot of associations during this period: while poetry was endorsed by the Party and authorities, at the same time it became a key medium of expression for the dissident movement, the inception of which is usually dated as the 1960s. The young Moscow ‘star’ poets, who published and appeared at official readings, have been described as ‘permitted dissidents’” (Lygo 2010, pp. 2-3). As early as April 1956, the prominent Soviet critic A. L. Dymshits gave a speech at the Fifth Conference of Young Writers of the North-Western USSR in which he called young authors to engage with the policy of de-Stalinisation through avoiding the cult of personality and the varnishing of reality. He also talked about the necessity of departing from the style of “pompous monumentalism” that is “alien to realism and the people” (Lygo 2010, p. 44).

*Through the prism of Inna Lisnjanskaja’s and Iosif Brodskij’s anti-monumentalist poetics: Cvetaeva as a spiritual leader.*

Arguably, despite the aforementioned images of Cvetaeva as a cultural hero, the most powerful recognition of Cvetaeva as a genius is inserted in Inna Lisnjanskaja’s 1974 poem “Your death bed is light...” (“Legka tvoja posmertnaja krovat’...”), in which Cvetaeva is defined as a genius whose existence was subordinated, Lisnjanskaja argues, to the spiritual awakening of humble human beings and who, in return, was subjected to constant attacks by them (Lisnjanskaja 2005, p. 81).

Lisnjanskaja's essay about Achmatova's long poem "Poem without a Hero" (Poema bez geroija) also talks about Cvetaeva's contribution to the development of Russian versification and the Russian stanza. While it pinpoints Cvetaeva's influence on Achmatova (Lisnjanskaja 1989), the essay also mentions Cvetaeva's engagement with Kuzmin and her ability to develop further many interesting innovative devices found in poetry of the Silver Age. Lisnjanskaja's own poetry contains many overtones that indicate her kinship with Cvetaeva, including her vision of poetry as a device for spiritual awakening; the use of a paradoxical mode of thinking; the employment of Biblical imagery and a strong interest in archetypal aspects of poetry that link poetry to ritual and music. Her 1968 poem "Back, back..." ("Nazad, nazad...") (Lisnjanskaja 2003, p. 26) invokes Cvetaeva's poem "Some people are created out of stone..." in which the lyric heroine celebrates her fluid self, akin to a sea wave, and promotes the notion of self-reinvention.

Lisnjanskaja's 1967 poem "There is no sweet oblivion..." ("Zabven'ja netu sladkogo...") successfully reproduces Cvetaeva's aphoristic style and her love for paradoxes. In the vein of Cvetaeva's defense of people who are poor and weak, the poem suggests that in contemporary Russia one would do better to ask for the help not of a rich person but of a poor one. It also claims that only sinful people should be able to forgive the person who seeks forgiveness: "Don't ask holy people for forgiveness./Ask sinners instead" (Lisnjanskaja 2003, p. 7). We could detect in Lisnjanskaja's poem the same attitude to poetry as manifested by Cvetaeva. Both poets see poetry as an aesthetic activity that captures the rich complexity of actuality and the plentitude of the objective world that resists linear and reductionist comprehension of reality. Both of them see poetic truth as manifesting a single-

minded attempt to find the very truth of existence. It is not coincidental that, together with Achmadulina, Semjon Lipkin and Voznesenskij, Lisnjajnskaja took part in the collection of unofficial experimental prose and poetry “Metropol,” published by Ardis in 1979, which was strikingly different from the official collections of verse and prose published in the Soviet Union.

Brodskij must be mentioned here as another poet of the post-Stalin era whose fascination with Cvetaeva enabled him to develop many metaphysical themes embedded in Russian eighteenth-century poetry, subverting thereby the monumental aspects of Socialist Realism. In his 1981 essay “Footnote to a Poem,” Brodskij provides an illuminating analysis of Cvetaeva’s 1927 long elegiac poem “New Year’s Greetings” (Novogodnee), in which the lyric heroine mourns the death of Rainer Maria Rilke. Like Achmadulina before him, Brodskij discerns autobiographical traits in Cvetaeva’s verse. He writes: “Every ‘on the death of’ poem [...] serves not only as a means for an author to express his sentiments occasioned by a loss but also as a pretext for more or less general speculations on the phenomenon of death per se. In mourning his loss [...] an author by the same token frequently mourns – directly, obliquely, often unwittingly – himself, for the tragic timbre is always autobiographical” (Brodsky 1987, p.195). More importantly, Brodskij analyses Cvetaeva’s long poem “New Year’s Greetings” as an exilic text par excellence that thematizes displacement and makes use of lexical units from different languages – in a way that foregrounds the relationship between language and poetry. Cvetaeva’s creative employment of interlinguality in the poem stems from her belief that all poets are translators by default because they articulate many unuttered and metaphysical truths in the universal language of human experiences.

In 1936, for example, she proclaimed that it would be possible to translate Pushkin from one language into another simply because he himself functioned as a translator of many truths and experiences into his own universal language that every human being would understand (Cvetaeva 1967, p. 237). Brodskij's analysis of Cvetaeva's "New Year's Greetings" suggests that he appreciates her "macaronic poem" for its use of foreign words in "a supralingual way" and its successful illustration of the fact that "poetry, in its essence, is itself a certain *other* language – or a translation from such" (Brodsky 1987, p.234). Brodskij writes: "In 'Novogodnee' Cvetaeva illustrates the immortality of a soul which has materialized through bodily activity – creative work – by her use of spatial categories, i.e. bodily ones, and this is what allows her not only to rhyme 'poet' with 'planet' but to equate them as well: the literal universe with the traditional universe of individual consciousness" (Brodskij 1987, pp. 236-237). It is clear from Brodskij's analysis that, as an émigré poet, he empathizes with Cvetaeva's view (manifested in her poem) that poets develop verbal strategies of coping with exposure to foreign languages in accordance with their own unique experiences. In other words, Brodskij learns from Cvetaeva's poem 'New Year's Greeting' about the creative potential of exilic displacement. According to Vladimir Zorić, "in a broad sense [...], interlingual selection in the poetry of exile involves translation as a metaphoric textual journey and, vice versa, geographical migration as a template for, and a form of, cross-cultural translation" (Zorić 2010, p. 205). In "New Year's Greetings," Cvetaeva achieved a metalingual effect through the use of the metaphor of the nest that explores the underlying metaphoric link between the Russian and German languages, which can be best assessed from the vantage point of the exotopic

perspective of a nest-star. Zorić elucidates this point succinctly: “While on the one hand projecting a metalingual paradigm that links the constituent codes of the interlingual poem, the metaphor of the nest also bears an imprint of the coercions that give rise to interlinguality, on the other. For besides being elevated, the nest is also a protective place, a haven” (Zorić 2010, p. 208). Zorić stops short of highlighting the fact that Cvetaeva equates thinking in poetic terms with dwelling, in the style of Martin Heidegger’s pronouncement about dwelling through the use of poetry and imagination. Yet, as Zorić points out, “in Cvetaeva and Nabokov languages add to one another through a series of complex interactions between different language codes, thereby enhancing our intellectual grasp of the world” (Zorić 2010, p. 220). In Zorić’s view, the effect created by the overarching compatibility of images that derive from different cultural traditions found in the works of Cvetaeva and Nabokov “suggests the possibility of a conception of exilic interlinguality” (Zorić 2010, p. 220). He thinks that, in Brodskij, the relationship between language and geographic location is presented in such a way that the exilic condition becomes both a metaphor and a paradigmatic axis that enables the poet to assess the validity and value of interlingual mediation.

Brodskij’s metaphoric concept of exilic interlinguality stresses the cognitive and aesthetic advantages of language contact. According to Brodskij, a writer’s linguistic consciousness is equivalent to a “sitting on top of a mountain and looking down at both slopes”. Brodskij affirms: “[...] you see both slopes and this is an absolutely special sensation. Were a miracle to occur and I were to return to Russia permanently I would be extremely nervous at not having the option of using more than one language” (Volkov, pp. 185–186). Brodskij’s mountaineering metaphor

invokes Cvetaeva's own imagery as manifested in her long poem "Poem of the Hill" (Poema gory) and "Ode to Walking" (Oda peshemu chodu). More importantly, Brodskij, like Cvetaeva before him, associates poetry with freedom that transgresses linguistic and geographic boundaries. In his autobiographical essay "In a Room and a Half", Brodskij explains his desire to write about his parents in English. "I write in English", affirms Brodskij, "because I want to grant them a margin of freedom: the margin whose width depends on the number of those who may be willing to read this. I want Maria Volpert and Alexander Brodsky to acquire reality under 'a foreign code of consciousness' [...] I want English verbs of motion to describe their movement. This won't resurrect them, but English grammar may at least prove to be a better escape route from the chimneys than the Russian" (Brodsky 1987, p. 460).

In his 1994 poem "I was accused of everything except the weather..." ("Menja uprekali vo vsem, okromja pogody"), Brodskij imagines his afterlife existence in the form of a star and, in a humorous way, states: "Я буду мерцать в проводах лейтенантом неба/и прятаться в облако, слыша гром".<sup>4</sup> While the image of a star alludes both to Cvetaeva's poem "New Year's Greetings" and to Majakovskij's poem "And would you be able to?" ("A Vy mogli by?"), the poem celebrates the power of imagination and mixes different stylistic registers, including military jargon, newspeak, archaisms, and colloquial expressions, in the style of Cvetaeva's 1930 cycle of poems "To Majakovskij" (Majakovskomu). In the cycle, Cvetaeva creates a dialogue between Majakovskij and Esenin and considers the contextual settings of their suicides. As Hasty aptly points out, Cvetaeva's cycle

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<sup>4</sup> "I will shine through the wires as a lieutenant of the sky/ and will hide in a cloud if I hear thunder...". (Translation is mine. – A.S.)



highlights how “Esenin’s shortcoming lies not in failure to respond in a positive way to the demands of his time as Majakovskij interpreted it but in his acceptance of those demands as valid for poetry” (Hasty 1991, p. 846). According to Cvetaeva, “Esenin failed to recognize that he *was* his own time, that in his poetry he created his time” (Hasty 1991, p. 846). In a similar vein, Brodskij’s poem “I was accused...” suggests that poets should not accept the ideological and social demands of their environment and that they should focus instead on the issues of spirituality and creativity that could enable them to enlighten others and explain their own understanding of the human condition. The last stanza of his poem has strong Cvetaeva-like overtones as it affirms that the task of every poet is to resist death and to overcome the chaos that has no meaning and cannot be comprehended: “Perhaps, the wall of the non-existence/will appreciate my attempt to turn it into a sieve” (Brodskij, p. 452).

*Cvetaeva as a Muse of Lament in Moscow samizdat poetry of the 1960s-80s : Leonid Gubanov’s and Olga Sedakova’s elegiac voices.*

Leonid Gubanov (1946-1983), one of the most exciting representatives of samizdat poetry of the 1960s-1970s, also felt a special kinship with Cvetaeva, and his long poems that employ many elements found in Russian folk songs and tales strongly resemble Cvetaeva’s poems that incorporate folkloric imagery and themes. Both Cvetaeva and Gubanov might be seen as vivid representatives of Moscow in Russian poetry because their allusions to famous Moscow landscapes, icons and history are inseparable from their poetic identity. According to Sibelan Forrester, Cvetaeva’s poems featuring the architecture of Moscow offer a metaphorical

recovery of the female body: “ [...] she revives the church by the presence of a woman’s body and language while at the same time the church’s status and aesthetic value lend value to the poet’s words” (Forrester 1992, p. 233). Gubanov’s poem “If only Cvetaeva were alive....” (“Byla b zhiva Cvetaeva...”) brings to the fore Cvetaeva’s profound links with Moscow and her own blasphemous vision of holiness associated with suffering and martyrdom:

[...] Была б жива Цветаева,  
Пришел бы в ноги кланяться,  
За то, что не святая,  
А лишь Страстная Пятница.<sup>5</sup> (Gubanov 2003, pp.186-187.)

For Gubanov, Cvetaeva’s image of the practitioner of black magic (chernoknizhnitsa) and of the sinful character who has a real passion for life appears to be a highly suitable role model in his search for a new poetic language that would break the mold of Socialist Realism. He describes Cvetaeva as his tender and glorious dear sister (sestritsa) who put the sign of cross on her chest before hanging herself in the style of Lev Tolstoj’s novel *Anna Karenina*, whose heroine thinks of God before killing herself. Gubanov’s use in this poem of archaisms and Christian imagery, together with some colloquial expressions, invokes Cvetaeva’s own poems about Moscow written in 1916-1921, in which traditional and

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<sup>5</sup> “If only Cvetaeva were alive/I would have come to her and bowed to her,/ In gratitude for the fact that she was not a holy person./She was just Good [literally, ‘Passionate’] Friday”.

unorthodox interpretations of Russian Orthodox icons and rituals coexist.

Furthermore, the poem is written from the point of view of a drunkard-poet who mourns Cvetaeva and imagines her drinking together with him. The poem utilizes the association that often exists in the popular imagination of Saint Mary Magdalene and Saint Mary of Egypt with fallen women and prostitution despite their religious status as exalted saints. At the same time, one stanza praises Cvetaeva as the happiest star that ever existed, one that flies over the abyss. Some stanzas present Cvetaeva as an addressee of the poem. The theme of the Last Judgement that permeates Cvetaeva's 1918 poem "Lifting my forehead and lowering my eyes..." is appropriated in Gubanov's poem in a non-religious sense, suggesting that only poets can act as true judges of other poets because their poetic words manifest the divine truth. The name "Good Friday" ascribed to Cvetaeva in Gubanov's poem refers to the notion of Passion (*Strastnaja pjatnitsa*). Forrester explains the use of the notion of passion in Cvetaeva's above mentioned poem thus: "The Russian tradition has always retained the ambiguous, dually sensual and religious connotations of the word *strast'* (passion) but here the passion associated with the speaker is denied to the Righteous, perhaps privileging the woman's body over those of 'holy' men. What appears at first reading to be merely duality is multiplied by the complexity of associations and by the vertical convergence, typical of Cvetaeva's poetics, in which heaven and hell, God and devil are separated by no more than a breath" (Forrester 1992, p. 242). Likewise, Gubanov's poem locates Cvetaeva in a poetic universe full of eclectic imagery and multiple meanings, which suggests that poets should assume a medial place. Such a place would enable them both to play sacrificial roles and to attain a wider understanding of reality as a dialectical process

and coming into being. His fascination with the deaths of such poets as Cvetaeva and Majakovskij might be explained by the fact that he was writing against the grain and his highly individualistic poetic voice was not welcomed by Soviet critics.

Gubanov founded an unofficial association of the most daring young poets of genius (SMOG) and was well known for his anarchic behavior and writing in the styles of Esenin, Cvetaeva and Velimir Chlebnikov. As Konstantin Kedrov maintains, Gubanov's unexpected death from natural causes at the age of 37 was perceived either as an act of suicide or as something triggered by the persistent violence of the state against him: "It is difficult to define Leonid Gubanov's death as natural. There was no noose, no revolver in his case; but at the same time he was a victim of Soviet tormenting psychiatric hospitals that served as ideological gas chambers of the late socialist period, where those poets who did not fit the grand plan of creating a radiant future were sent" (Gubanov 2003, p. 705). In Kedrov's view, Gubanov's poetry conveys the most truthful account of his generation's agony in the 1960s-70s. Kedrov's assessment resonates well with Evtushenko's opinion that Gubanov was an extraordinary talented poet, alcoholic and madman. Evtushenko defines many of Gubanov's poems as prophetic writing informed by somnambulistic states of mind (Gubanov 2003, p.704). Gubanov was seen as a prominent leader of rebellious poets who organized demonstrations against the Union of Writers. Such a perception of Gubanov as a poet-rebel might have been created by his own self-fashioning of himself as an heir of Cvetaeva. It had a considerable impact on his fellow poets. Thus Olga Sedakova's poem "On Leonid Gubanov's Death" ("Na smert' Leonida Gubanova") might be read both as an elegy that laments the whole generation of post-war poets who were subjected to political

pressures and censorship and as an homage to Cvetaeva. Given Gubanov's sense of a profound kinship with Cvetaeva, it is not surprising that Sedakova's poem dedicated to Gubanov invokes Cvetaeva's long poem "New Year Greetings", written in memory of Rilke. Sedakova's poem, presented in the form of a continuous dialogue with Gubanov, addresses him affectionately as "Ljonja". It highlights how any authentic expression of creativity or affection was perceived by the Soviet authorities as a criminal act:

Как эквилибрист–лунатик, засыпая,  
преступая через естество,  
знаешь, через что я преступаю?  
Чрез ненужность ничего.<sup>6</sup>

In the true Metarealist manner, Sedakova's poem on Gubanov's death claims that postmodern poetry does not offer a radical substitution of signs for the real, in the style of Baudrillard's theory of the hyperreal, but instead discovers a metaphysical dimension and conveys an ironic knowledge of the past. Such a view invokes Cvetaeva's exploration of metaphysical themes in her 1925 collection of poems *After Russia* (Posle Rossii), written in emigration, in which familiar objects from the past are assessed either from a distance or in an estranged manner.

By suggesting that both Gubanov and the lyric persona of the poem ought to work harder as poets in hope that God would not forget them, Sedakova reinstates

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<sup>6</sup> "As a sleepwalker on a tightrope, falling asleep deeper, /oversteps nature, /do you know what I step over?/ *The uselessness of nothing.*" (Translation is mine – A.S.)

the notion of art in the light of conscience as described in Cvetaeva's essay, "Art in the Light of Conscience", which maintains, anticipating Theodor Adorno's concerns about the notion of the sublime in post-Holocaust literature, that for Russian modernist poets it would seem unethical to write texts using language that had lost meaning. Cvetaeva finds it problematic to write poems in praise of God using language that has become anaemic and reduced to a collection of clichés. She asserts that poets should develop a new ethical approach to language and poetry, avoiding thereby using for prayer and praise of God a language that devalued all the humanist values and was used to praise absolutely everything. The assertion about the unethical use of cliché to describe important humanist values is strongly felt in Sedakova's ironic suggestion that, in the contemporary world of Cold War realities, the word *death* had become a cliché and travesty. To highlight the uniqueness of each individual life, Sedakova employs an intimate conversational style in her poem, presenting Gubanov both as a fellow-poet and as a friend. Sedakova's desire to inscribe her incarnate connection with underground Soviet culture evokes Cvetaeva's employment of personal names and autobiographical details in her long poem "New Year's Greetings" and in her 1930 cycle of poems dedicated to Majakovskij.

In a poem written in memory of Brodskij, "In Memory of a Poet" Sedakova also mimics Cvetaeva's device of the extra-stanzaic verse in the concluding lines: it is unfinalized, because it ends with a dash. Sedakova seems to be playing on the expectation of readers versed in Cvetaeva's poetics to find a short unfinished line, but they are left instead with a void. By linking poetry with the established Orpheus myth in her poem "In Memory of a Poet", as did Cvetaeva before her, Sedakova

conveys her belief that a true poet cannot die and that the creative spirit will continue to live on and renew itself. She asserts that Russian poetry still offers much potential for future development. In other words, Sedakova has not only learnt from Cvetaeva how to create a paradoxical sense of ending and not ending on the formal level of versification and strophic form, but she also has adopted Cvetaeva's artistic worldview, which depends on paradoxical thinking and resists closure and finality. In this sense, both Cvetaeva and Sedakova seem to develop, in their own way, Andrej Bely's vision of symbolism, which he called symbolist realism.

Although Michail Epstein does not reveal any links between Bely's post-symbolist thinking of the 1910s-20s and Metarealist writing, he nevertheless points out that the Metarealist art of metaphysical revelations may be related to neo-Romanticism or neo-Symbolism, "with the notable difference that it is devoid of the haughty pretensions of the romantic personality and the abstract codes of symbolic doubleness (*dvoemirie*)" (Epstein 1999, p.113). As Epstein asserts, "Metarealism is a poetics of the homogenous, indivisible unfolding of a multifaceted reality, where the lyrical 'I' gives way to a lyrical 'It'" (ibid.). In Sedakova's poems, including the poem "On the Death of a Poet", the voices of mournful Muses merge until they represent a simultaneous abstract form of speaking, in the vein of a Bergsonian model of time that resembles the role of singing in the ancient Greek chorus, invoking thereby Cvetaeva's neo-classical tragedies, in which the ancient and the contemporary worlds coexist. In other words, Sedakova's text is multi-voiced and endowed with a polystylistic quality, but it presents a homogenous space in which Achmatova and Cvetaeva change places and speak like each other.

As has been demonstrated above, the reception of Cvetaeva before

Perestroika was patchy because many of her poems and autobiographical works were not published in the Soviet Union until the end of the 1980s-1990s: these comprised the works that expressed her sympathies with the White movement and with the Russian monarchy. The 1990 volume from the series “Poet’s Library” – edited and compiled by Elena Korkina – rectified the omission of politically charged texts and produced a more balanced image of Cvetaeva. The print run of that volume was 150,000. It was followed by publication of the collected works and numerous biographies of Cvetaeva. The first publication of the seven-volume collected works of Cvetaeva in Russia in 1994 by publisher “Ellis Lak” made Cvetaeva’s works accessible to a wider readership, because the American edition of her collected works produced by Russica publishers in the late 1970s-early 1980s was available almost exclusively to émigré readers outside Russia. A similar rediscovery took place with Achmatova. In her essay “Women’s Poetry since the Sixties,” Stephanie Sandler points out that most Russian women poets who have emerged since the 1960s “have been seen as writing in the shadow of Cvetaeva or Akhmatova (or both)” (Sandler 2002, p. 275). Sandler’s essay calls for an evaluation of the role of the modernist canon in Russia. She states: “Tasks facing scholars of the contemporary period include disentangling the legacies of the two poets [...], studying the use of their poems as subtexts alongside poetic material by other poets, and understanding the way their poetic careers became seductive models or taboo examples – or both” (ibid.). Some playful responses to them are evident, too. Thus Sandler refers to Junna Moric, a well-established Soviet poet, who claims that the Russian female poetic force is a plant in which Achmatova and Cvetaeva are fused together: “The unit of female force in Russian poetry is the *akhmatsvet*” (ibid.). In



the post-Soviet period, playful comments about Achmatova and Cvetaeva came to replace the reverence of underground or semi-official authors, whose alternative writing developed the experiments embedded in modernist poetry.

Today it has become clear from memoir and autobiographical literature written by representatives of the Thaw generation and their followers that Cvetaeva, Mandelshtam and Achmatova held a special place in the cultural imagination of Russian readers of the 1960-80s as martyrs opposed to the Stalinist regime. In her recently published collection of poetry *ThroughLake (SkvOzero)*, Moric employs the description of nostalgia found in Cvetaeva's poem "Homesickness" ("Toska po rodine") in order to condemn the dependence of many contemporary poets on the political regimes that secure their financial existence, and in a manner akin to Cvetaeva she proclaims that the essence of poetry is the expression of eternal truths. As Moric puts it, "there is so much nostalgia in my native land" that it is better to follow the gaze that penetrates the clouds instead of observing everyday life in Russia. She proclaims the search for a higher reality to be a true sense of nostalgia that should worry poets (Moric 2014, p. 83). It is clear from the various allusions to Cvetaeva in *ThroughLake*, that, following the deaths of Achmadulina and Brodskij, Moric continues to maintain Cvetaeva's image as a non-conformist poet whose deeds and words were inseparable. At the same time, her redefinition of Cvetaeva's nostalgia might be seen as a manifestation of the need to focus on transnational aspects of poetry rather than on local identities and on national traditions. It resembles the attempts undertaken by Achmadulina and Brodskij to read Cvetaeva as a transnational poet whose longing for a world culture was comparable to Mandelshtam's as manifested in his seminal 1913 article "The Morning of

Acmeism”.

*Cvetaeva as a Poet with History: Marija Stepanova and Post-Soviet Readership.*

According to Marija Stepanova (born in 1972), a prominent poet and critic who emerged during the post-Soviet period, the poetry of Cvetaeva and Chlebnikov sounds highly contemporary to any post-Soviet poetry lover (Stepanova 2012). As has been discussed above, the poets of the Thaw generation cherished Cvetaeva as a symbol of resistance to oppressive political regimes and a strong advocate of eternal truths who produced a vision of the transnational brotherhood of all poets. In contrast to such poets as Achmadulina, Gubanov and Brodskij, who were also fascinated by the confessional aspects of Cvetaeva's works, Stepanova downplays the role of the poetic biography in the reception of poets and accentuates the importance of the notion of the depersonalized living word as articulated in Cvetaeva's works about Pushkin and other poets, including Maksimilian Voloshin. Cvetaeva's polyphonic mode of writing and dialogicity were appropriated in Stepanova's poetry of the 1990s-2000s in order to demonstrate that the death of the poet can be celebrated as an opportunity to express a new transgressive self based on the articulation of universal aspects of humanity and of different voices affected by suffering. Thus Stepanova's portrayal of her mother, her grandmother and herself as a collective body contained by the same dress in the poem "My mother, my grandmother and me on 9 May" ("Ja, mama, babushka, 9 maja") and the comparison of family conversations about the Second World War to a *treillage* because of their trinity-like spirit (Stepanova 2001) invoke Cvetaeva's philosophical poetry in which the principles of unity, empathy and spiritual growth are reinforced, including her long poem "New Year's Greetings", discussed by Brodskij.

According to Stepanova, Cvetaeva's poetry might be seen as a living embodiment of common sense and as a manifestation of the principle of the orderly organization of life, despite the fact that her life and her art often compete with each other in the eyes of her readers. Stepanova thinks that the myth created in Cvetaeva's confessional and autobiographical works tends to overshadow Cvetaeva's poetic persona, which has a much more authentic human voice than the mythopoeic contradictory self-representations found in Cvetaeva's works as well as in various memoirs written by her contemporaries. More importantly, Stepanova sees Cvetaeva as a stoic person who did her best to survive and to adjust to the historical changes and cataclysms of the 1910s-1930s (Stepanova 2009). She argues that Cvetaeva voiced the concerns of many people traumatized by the political events of the 1910s-1930s and that her works should be most of all appreciated for their witness account quality (Stepanova 2009). Such a view of Cvetaeva as a poet-historian adds a new layer to the reception of Cvetaeva in the post-Soviet period, when her life and art were assessed as part of a new wave of destalinization and of large-scale re-assessment of the Soviet period.

### *Conclusion.*

The present chapter outlined the trajectory of the reception of Cvetaeva in Russia in the 1950s-2000s. It focused on the most engaging creative dialogues with Cvetaeva found in the poetry of Tarkovskij, Evtushenko, Brodskij, Achmadulina, Lisnjanskaja, Gubanov and Sedakova. It demonstrated how Cvetaeva's conception of poetry as the living embodiment of all the European poetry that was ever written – as exemplified by her image of Orpheus as the archetypal poet of all time – had

considerable impact on the artistic imagination and creative strategies of major poets of the post-Stalin period. Cvetaeva's conception of the poetic mind as a passive catalyst in the presence of which free floating images, emotions and feelings become transmuted into art (as exemplified by her essay "Art in the Light of Conscience") stands close to Eliot's impersonal theory of poetry. Both poets saw the modern poet as a performer of a significant form of cultural labour, a bearer of tradition, and as a philosopher who ascribes the modern world with shape and meaning. Given Cvetaeva's close links with European poetry, the rediscovery of her works after Stalin's death enabled Russian poets and artists to reinstate themselves as part of the European cultural elite after many Stalinist years of isolation from the West. By reimagining the themes and values of European and Russian Romanticism, Cvetaeva created her own mode of self-referential lyric poetry which is oriented towards engagement with tradition, impersonality and replacement of the vagueness of romantic thinking with the modern adoption of Reason's clearer conception and stronger control of emotion. Her conception of impersonality in literary works (as formulated in "Art in the Light of Conscience") as an escape from emotion and personality was constructed in opposition to the Romantic mode of expression: her image of the poet as a wandering Jew and a critic who challenges Kant (embedded in her long poem "Poem of the End" and the cycle "Poets") is a good example of her tendency to think in images and ascribe them with physical uniqueness in order to provide the direct representation of what is being intuited. Cvetaeva's Bergsonian association of poetry with intuited truth not discursively explicable by reason gave Russian post-Stalin poets an opportunity to move away from the 1930s highly prescriptive artistic mode of expression. As Mikhail Epstein

concedes, the most representative genre of the Soviet epoch was not novel or poetry but “metatextual discourse of cultural codes, such as the encyclopedia or textbook, in which an author remains anonymous in the midst of generally accepted opinions” (Epstein 1995, p.359). The engagement with Cvetaeva’s poetry enabled post-Stalin poets to reinforce the ancient belief that poetry had a special access to truth. It empowered them with the special sense of authority to use poetry not for ideological purposes but as a special form of cognition with the help of which they could pierce visible, intuitive truth and subsequently communicate it through visual metaphors and images. Not only they incarnated Cvetaeva’s demand for the autonomy of art from contemporary social concerns in their own works, but they also promoted poetry as a special aesthetic form having its own referentiality and functions as a depository of collective memory.

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